

IV. GREAT NORTHWEST REGION

BACKGROUND

LANDSCAPE SETTING

The Great Northwest Region is in the northwestern part of the state and is comprised of Ashland, Barron, Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas, Polk, Rusk, Sawyer, and Washburn counties. The region as a whole has an abundance of natural resources such as Lake Superior, the Namekagon River, the St. Croix River, and the Chequamegon National Forest.

The region is made up of five different ecological landscapes, all with unique characteristics. Along Lake Superior's south shore is a coastal plain that contains many small rivers and streams. Immediately south of Superior is an isolated part of the state that harbors extensive, unbroken forests within which are imbedded several very large undisturbed peatlands. To the west, waterfalls, cliffs, glades, and rock-walled gorges are found within the St. Croix Valley. The eastern half of this region is composed of vast northern hardwood forests that support a variety of wildlife, including many that need large blocks of habitat to survive. Many large wetlands, small creeks, rivers, and small kettle lakes occur. The exceptional water quality and aquatic diversity of the lakes and rivers here is a result of the heavily forested landscape. Polk and Barron counties represent the northern extent of predominantly agricultural land use. Remaining forests there tend to occur as fragments and small kettle lakes are common.

Several high-quality streams originate in this region, some draining north to Lake Superior, others flowing south to the St. Croix River, one of the state's ecological and recreational jewels. Other significant resource areas include the Apostle Island National Lakeshore, Chequamegon National Forest, and the Bois Brule, Chippewa, White, Onion, Flambeau, and Namekagon Rivers.

LOCAL ECONOMY

The variety in landscapes allows this region to support a plethora of outdoor recreation opportunities, making tourism a large and growing industry. These opportunities have drawn many to the region from the Twin Cities and surrounding suburban areas, as well as visitors from within Wisconsin. The influx of visitors is placing increasing pressure on the region's recreational resources. Seasonal home development, particularly along river and lakeshore areas, has increased dramatically within the Great Northwest.

The major land use in the north is forestry products with recreation and tourism becoming a larger part of the economy. Agriculture becomes more of a factor in the local economy in the south and west portions of the region where soils are more fertile and suitable for tilling.

RECREATION USE AND PARTICIPATION

With the large amount of public land in this area, the region is a very popular vacation and outdoor recreation destination. With county, state, and federal lands combined, there are over 2 million acres of public recreation lands. The uplands draw hunters, wildlife watchers, snowmobile and ATV riders, off road bikers, skiers, and horseback riders, among others. The rivers, streams, lakes, and flowages attract anglers, boaters, kayakers, and canoeists from throughout the Midwest. This is one of the best areas in the state to provide a diverse set of long distance and loop trails for both motorized and nonmotorized forms of recreation.

Lake Superior and its shoreline draw visitors from throughout North America. The Apostle Islands National Lakeshore features pristine stretches of sand beach, spectacular sea caves, remnant old-growth forests, and the largest collection of lighthouses anywhere in the National Park system. In particular, under the right winter conditions, the ice caves that develop attract visitors from all over the world. With a series of primitive campsites scattered throughout the islands, the area offers a boating and paddling experience unparalleled in the Midwest.

Additionally, the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway is a national water trail that draws thousands of visitors annually.

Thousands of lakes and flowages in the region provide the gamut of fishing and other water sports. The many streams and rivers offer excellent fishing, particularly for trout. Several of the rivers are also popular paddling waters, notably the Bois Brule, Flambeau, Montreal, and Namekagon Rivers. Chequamegon Bay hosts a very productive and diverse fishery including trout, salmon, pike, walleye, and bass.

Exceptional concentrations of migratory birds (waterbirds, songbirds, and raptors) occur at the western end of Lake Superior and attract bird watchers from across the region. Crex Meadows, in fact, is one of the Midwest's most popular wildlife watching destinations. Camping and hiking are popular in the several state and local parks situated along the string of waterfalls that run along the escarpment of Lake Superior. The North Country Trail passes through many of these parks.

Recreation participation rates for Wisconsin residents statewide are presented on page 5 in the introduction chapter. Many participation rates of the Great Northwest Region vary somewhat to the participation rates of the state's overall population. The table to the right lists the activities that residents of the nine counties comprising the Great Northwest Region participate in more, or less, frequently than the state average.

Activities that residents of the Great Northwest Region participate in at higher rates than the state average:

- 4WD driving
- ATV/UTV riding
- Bird/wildlife watching
- Cross-country skiing/ snowshoeing
- Fishing – from a boat, canoe or kayak
- Fishing – ice fishing
- Harvesting berries/mushrooms, etc.
- Hunting – big game
- Hunting – small game
- Motorboating including pontoons
- Target shooting - firearms
- Target shooting - archery
- Snowmobiling

Activities that residents of the Great Northwest Region participate in at lower rates than the state average:

- Swimming in community pools
- Visiting a dog park

EXISTING RECREATION SUPPLY IN THE GREAT NORTHWEST REGION

PUBLIC LANDS FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION

The Great Northwest Region has the 2nd-most public land available for outdoor recreation at approximately 2,000,000 acres. A variety of opportunities are available in and around Lake Superior as well as the large public land blocks. This section briefly describes the public conservation and recreation lands in the Great Northwest Region. A description of all public lands in Wisconsin is provided in Appendix 3.

a) Federal

The National Forest Service owns and manages just over 580,000 acres in the Great Northwest Region as part of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest (CNNF). The CNNF is managed for multiple uses including forest production, wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation, water quality and fisheries habitat, and wilderness areas.

The US Fish & Wildlife Service manages some small properties for prairie habitat restoration, wildlife refuge, and waterfowl production.

The National Park Service owns and manages almost 18,000 acres between two properties. The Apostle Island National Lakeshore features pristine stretches of sand beach, spectacular sea caves, remnant old-growth forests, and the largest collection of lighthouses anywhere in the National Park system. The St. Croix National Scenic Riverway is a national water trail that stretches 200 miles on the Namekagon and St. Croix Rivers, beginning in Cable.

b) State

The Department of Natural Resources owns 426,000 acres in the Great Northwest Region. State properties in the region span the range of intended recreational settings and development levels (Map B3). At one end of the spectrum are properties such as Interstate Park that include intensive recreation settings with developed campgrounds, miles of trails, nature center, and picnic sites. Crux Meadows attracts over 100,000 visitors each year and provides a range of outdoor recreation opportunities in a largely non-developed setting. In addition, properties like Brule River State Forest and Flambeau River State Forest provide fishing and a variety of remote wilderness opportunities.

At the other end of the spectrum are properties like Bibon Swamp State Natural Area, lands specifically acquired to protect high-quality native plant communities and rare species. Although these types of properties can provide some limited recreation opportunities for low-impact activities such as hunting, bird watching, and nature study, their primary purpose is not necessarily to provide recreation opportunities requiring development or infrastructure.

The State Board of Commissioners of Public Land owns about 4,700 acres in the region. These lands are scattered throughout the region in tracts typically several hundred acres or smaller in size. The BCPL manages its lands primarily for forest products. Many of the BCPL lands are isolated or contain wetlands and generally have limited recreation potential.

c) County

The Great Northwest Region has the largest collection of acreage in the County Forest Program, enrolling over 991,000 acres across the nine counties. These lands provide a variety of benefits including forest products, fisheries and wildlife habitat, many types of outdoor recreation, and water quality protection. The Douglas County Forest, the largest in the state at over 280,000 acres, is used by residents and visitors from outside the region for a variety of trail activities, camping, hunting and fishing, and other recreation pursuits.

Most of these counties manage parks that provide campgrounds, boat launches, and other types of infrastructure to support recreation.

d) Other

Many cities, villages, and townships in the Great Northwest Region own and manage parks, boat access sites, and other properties that provide opportunities for outdoor recreation. Given their easy proximity to many citizens, although these properties tend to be small they are typically well used. In addition, several school forests in the region are open to some forms of recreation, generally when they are not in use by school and community groups.

PRIVATE LANDS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION

This section summarizes the privately-owned lands in the region that are open to the public for some types of recreation. A detailed description of private lands in Wisconsin open to the public is provided in Appendix 3.

a) Forest Legacy program easements

Approximately 76,000 acres in the Great Northwest Region are part of the Forest Legacy program, which is designed to identify and protect environmentally important private forestlands threatened with conversion to non-forest uses (such as subdivision for residential or commercial development). To help maintain the integrity and traditional uses of private forestlands, the Forest Legacy Program promotes the use of conservation easements.

b) Managed Forest Law (MFL) and Forest Crop Law enrolled lands

The amount of land enrolled in these forestry programs is spread across the counties in the Great Northwest Region. Almost 412,000 acres in the region are currently enrolled in these programs. Because these

programs use 25 or 50 year contracts, the total amount enrolled changes from year to year as landowners enroll lands into the program (only the MFL program is open to enrollment) and contracts covering other lands expire. MFL-closed land is not open for public use.

c) Land trusts

These land trusts operate in the Great Northwest Region: Couderay Waters Regional Land Trust, Standing Cedars Community Land Conservancy, Star Prairie Land Preservation Trust, The Prairie Enthusiasts, Bayfield Regional Conservancy, Madeline Island Wilderness Preserve, Deer Lake Conservancy, West Wisconsin Land Trust, and The Conservation Fund. These non-profit conservation organizations have protected over 2,200 acres in the region. Most of these lands are open to the public for some forms of recreation such as hunting, fishing, hiking, wildlife watching, snowshoeing, and other similar activities.

d) Voluntary Public Access Program

The DNR Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program provides financial incentives to private landowners who open their property to public hunting, fishing, trapping and wildlife observation. Funding was authorized in the 2008 and 2014 Farm Bills. 2014 funds are administered and provided by U.S. Department of Agriculture NRCS. To date, there are over 2,600 acres available in the Great Northwest Region.

EXISTING PUBLIC RECREATION INFRASTRUCTURE

The department contacted representatives from county governments and regional organizations to gather information about the recreation opportunities available to the public across the Great Northwest Region. In addition, department staff searched websites for additional data and descriptions of the recreation opportunities provided. Maps C and D show existing recreation infrastructure in the nine counties of the region.

The Great Northwest Region contains many large public land holdings, notably the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, three state forests and the nine County Forests. These properties provide a wide range of high-quality recreation opportunities. What follows are a few examples of infrastructure in the Great Northwest Region that support a variety of recreation activities.

a) Copper Falls State Park:

- Off road and mountain bike trails
- 20+ miles groomed cross-country skiing trails
- Hiking and nature trails, plus a segment of the North Country Trail
- Family, group and backpack camping
- 5 picnic/day use areas and observation tower
- Swimming beach and boat access site
- Hunting, fishing and trapping opportunities
- Nature study, photography, wildlife watching, scenic viewing opportunities

b) Pattison State Park

- 5+ miles of groomed cross-country skiing trails
- Hiking and nature trails and waterfalls
- Family and backpack camping opportunities
- Swimming and picnic areas
- Hunting, fishing and trapping opportunities
- Nature study, photography, wildlife watching, scenic viewing opportunities

c) Flambeau River State Forest

- 77 miles of class I-V whitewater rapids with riverside campsites
- Remote and family campgrounds
- Boating and canoe/kayak opportunities

- Swimming beaches and picnic areas
- 14+ miles of groomed cross-country skiing and mountain biking trails
- 38+ miles of ATV trails and 55+ miles of snowmobile trails
- Hiking, cross country skiing and snowshoeing
- Hunting, fishing and trapping opportunities
- Nature study, photography, wildlife watching opportunities

d) Brule River State Forest

- Premier trout fishing
- 16+ miles of cross country ski trails
- 60 miles of hunter walking trails and segment of the North Country Trail
- 10 canoe landings and 44 miles of water trail
- Hiking/snowshoe trails and horseback riding on forest roads
- Hunting, fishing and trapping opportunities
- Nature study, photography, picnic areas and wildlife watching opportunities

e) Governor Knowles State Forest

- 40 miles of hiking trails and backpack camping
- 32+ miles winter ATV and snowmobile trails
- 9 miles groomed cross-country skiing
- 40+ miles of horseback riding trails and campground
- Hunting, fishing and trapping opportunities
- Nature study, photography, wildlife watching opportunities

f) Crex Meadows Wildlife Area

- Education and visitor center
- Auto tour wildlife watching opportunities
- Hiking, cross country skiing and snowshoeing
- Hunting, fishing and trapping opportunities
- Nature study, photography, edibles gathering

g) State Wildlife and Fishery Areas

- Hunting, fishing and trapping opportunities
- Hiking, nature study, photography, wildlife watching opportunities

h) State and National Land and Water Trails

- 14 miles of groomed cross-country skiing
- 60+ miles of surfaced biking trails
- 200 miles of ATV and 255 miles of snowmobile trails
- 300+ miles of hiking on Ice Age and North Country State and National Scenic Trails
- 400 miles of Lake Superior Water Trail
- 200 miles of St. Croix National Scenic Riverway water trail

i) Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest

- 23+ mile horse trail and campground
- 3 bike trail loops including the CAMBA Trail
- 140 miles of ATV trail and campground
- 8 cross country ski trails
- 9 campgrounds
- Hiking and hunter walking trails
- Hunting, fishing and trapping opportunities
- Nature study, photography, wildlife watching opportunities

e) County Forests (selected examples)

- Ashland: 20 miles of non-motorized trail, boat access sites, primitive camping
- Barron: 7 boat access sites, firearm range, horse trail and campground
- Bayfield: 44 miles of dog sledding, 52 miles ATV, 31 miles of cross-country ski trails
- Burnett: 52 miles ATV and 300 miles of snowmobile trails, horseback riding on forest roads
- Douglas: 10 miles of ski, 14 miles of horse, 100 miles ATV and 300 miles of snowmobile trails
- Polk: primitive camping and hiking, biking and horseback riding on forest roads
- Rusk: 332 miles of snowmobile, 24 miles ATV and 20 miles of ski trails, 21 boat access sites
- Sawyer: 32 miles of bike trails, 130+ ATV and snowmobile trails, primitive camping
- Washburn: 30+ miles of horse trails, 103 miles of ATV trails, 3 cross country ski loops, 14 miles of mountain bike trails, 11 boat access sites

PUBLIC INPUT ON RECREATION NEEDS IN THE GREAT NORTHWEST REGION

INPUT GATHERED AS PART OF THE ROA.

The department hosted three public open house meetings, in Ashland, Siren and Ladysmith, on August 28, 29 and 30, 2017, respectively. These open houses were designed to both present information about the ROA and to gather public input on the types of recreation activities they pursued, what places they liked to visit (including what attributes drew them to these properties), and what additional opportunities they wished were available in the Great Northwest Region.

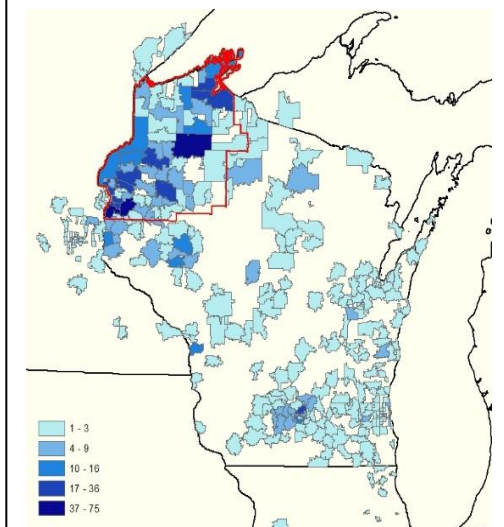
In addition to these open houses, the department posted an online public input form on its web page. A downloadable version was also available for people who preferred to print, fill out, and send in the form. The public input period ran from August 3 to September 8. The department sent out information and press releases about the ROA project and encouraged people to share their perspectives through the online or hardcopy public input forms. Recreation groups, non-profit organizations, and others distributed links to the input form to their members.¹

The department received comments in the following formats:

- 1,313 online public input forms
- 64 paper copies of the public input form
- 15 letters and emails

It is important for readers to keep in mind that the public input received through the ROA process is simply information gathered at one point in time, using an open-access technique. It is not a representation of what the “average” resident believes or the range of perspectives that exist.

Number of input forms submitted, by zip code



¹ The public input form was available for anyone to complete and over 1,300 people did so. The department's experience is that when it provides "open access" opportunities in which anyone can participate, the people that respond tend to be those that find out about the input opportunity and to have a particular or active interest in a specific issue; that is, they care enough about an issue to take the time to find and fill out the form or write an email or letter. The responses received are valuable in providing the department with an understanding of people's perspectives, reasoning, and breadth of viewpoints. However, because there is no "defined population" from which these responses originate, from a statistical perspective there is no way to know how the respondents compare to a larger population (for example, how the 1,300 respondents compare to the population of the nine-county region or the state as a whole) and therefore no way that the results can be generalized with an associated error margin to a larger population.

Respondents were asked to list the zip code of their primary residence. Of those who provided this information, the map on the previous page shows their distribution and frequency. As can be seen, the primary residence of many people who provided input is within the nine-county Great Northwest Region. Almost 20% of the respondents identified themselves as living in Polk County. As can also be seen, many respondents live outside the region (55% of respondents). Almost 10% of respondents live out of state, mostly from Minnesota. Undoubtedly, this reflects the large number of seasonal homes and the extent to which the region is a destination for vacationers. It also likely reflects the efforts of groups and organizations encouraging their members throughout the state and Midwest to complete the input form.

As is clear from the number and variety of the comments received, the Great Northwest Region plays an important role in the state's outdoor recreation system. Large blocks of public land and numerous lakes and waterways has attracted outdoor enthusiasts for generations. The region has drawn vacationers from the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metro Area for years since the transportation system provides quality access to the area. The region has also historically been a popular destination for fall hunting seasons, where at one time, hunting camps (also known as "deer camps") were very popular in the state's early days. The department received comments, perspectives and ideas on the following topics.

Participation in outdoor recreation

Not surprisingly, respondents to the public input form participate in many outdoor recreation activities. Popular activities that were selected by respondents are seen in the table at right. These results resemble the participation results from the recent Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) survey. The **bolded** activities in the table at right were the most popular activities that the SCORP survey indicated residents in the Great Northwest Region participate in. As can be seen, the activities that respondents to the ROA input form participate in are like the results of the random sample of Great Northwest Region residents generated by the SCORP survey.

Popular recreation activities in which respondents to the ROA input form participate

Bicycling – paved trails
 Bicycling – mountain biking, single track
 Bicycling – winter/fat tire
Camping – tent
Canoeing/kayaking
 Cross-country skiing/ snowshoeing
Fishing – from a boat, canoe or kayak
Fishing – from shore
Harvesting berries, mushrooms, etc.
Hiking, walking, running on trails
Swimming
Wildlife/bird watching

Properties that people visit

Over 40% of the Great Northwest Region is in public ownership, most of any of the regions in this analysis. With the abundance of public lands to recreate on, there is no shortage of places to go. The most popular state parks among people who provided input were Interstate and Copper Falls State Parks. The Gandy Dancer State Trail and Amnicon Falls State Park were almost as popular destinations. Of the people that submitted information through the public input form, over half had walked the Ice Age Trail and visited the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest in the last three years. Almost as many people reported visiting the Apostle Islands and the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway. Other popular properties include Crex Meadows, the Chippewa Flowage, Brule River State Forest, and the Bayfield County Forest.

Factors important in determining favorite places to visit

Of the people providing input, the majority (72%) selected (1) the quality of trails as one of the top four most important factors in determining their favorite property to visit. This is expected, given that many respondents noted their participation in a variety of motorized and non-motorized trail activities. In decreasing order, the next three most important factors are: (2) the desire to be in a quiet place, (3) the quality of the habitat, and (4) good maps, signs, or information about the property.

Additional outdoor recreation opportunities needed

Over eighty percent of respondents believe that more recreational opportunities are needed in the Great Northwest Region. Of the additional opportunities desired by respondents, the top three choices selected were trail-related. Again, this speaks to the respondent's participation in a variety of trail activities. Trails for motorized recreation is less of a need compared to other parts of the state because of the robust ATV/UTV network through off-road trails and road routes with over 4,500 miles available. The opportunity that was most frequently selected as needed in the Great Northwest Region was more trails for hiking, walking, or running, which was selected by more than one-third of respondents.

The recent SCORP survey of statewide residents found a correlation between the activities that people pursue and their perspectives on what additional opportunities are needed in their home county. For many activities, participants generally believed there was a need for more opportunities. The public input received as part of the ROA showed a similar pattern in the Great Northwest Region. For example, a majority (60%) of people who ride single track mountain bike believe there is a need for more mountain biking trails in the Great Northwest Region. Considering those who identified themselves as ATV/UTV riders, about half thought that there was need for more motorized recreation trails. Similarly, those who ride bike on paved trails or hike/walk/run on trails, just over half of each thought there was need for more of their respective trails. Since there were so many who responded who said they hiked/walked/ran trails (over 1,000), the largest need cited by people was for more hiking/walking/running trails. Only 20% of those who canoed/kayaked thought there was more need for water accesses.

For respondents who participate in big game hunting in the Great Northwest Region, less than 25% believe that more lands open to public hunting are needed as well as larger populations of big game species (e.g., deer and bear). For hunters as a group, their top selection for future needs was more hiking/walking/running trails followed by natural surface (dirt) bicycling trails.

Department-managed roads and motorized access

About 1,000 miles of department roads exist on department properties in the Great Northwest Region, some of which are former logging roads. Generally, these roads are used primarily for management purposes, including primitive seasonal logging roads, natural resource management or other property service activities.

Almost one-third (300 miles) of these roads are part of the property transportation network and open to the public to drive "street-legal vehicles" (this includes cars, pick-up trucks, SUVs, motorcycles, and other licensed vehicles). By state law, these roads are also open to horses, horse-drawn vehicles, and bicycles. Many local units of government in the region have authorized some types of motorized recreational vehicles on designated local roads.

Top 10 most frequently identified recreation opportunities needed in the Great Northwest Region, based on public input gathered during the ROA process

Activity	# of responses
More hiking/walking/running trails	637
More paved bicycling trails	503
More natural surface (dirt) bicycling trails	496
More rustic/quiet campgrounds (pit toilets, no electricity or generators)	355
More public shore access to lakes & streams	225
More local parks and playgrounds	197
More developed campgrounds (electric hook-ups, flush toilets, showers)	167
More wildlife watching decks or platforms	154
More trails for motorized recreation (ATVs, UTVs, off-road motorcycles, etc.)	151
More horseback trails	134

The department sought public feedback on potentially opening none, some, or all department roads that are currently open to “street-legal” vehicles in the Great Northwest Region to motorized recreation vehicles.² About 47% of people that provided responses believed that all DNR roads should remain closed to motorized recreational vehicles. Of the 48% that supported allowing motorized recreational vehicles on DNR roads, most thought that this access should be on a subset of roads that connect larger regional motorized recreation networks. In addition, 34% of these respondents supporting opening roads thought opening should occur to provide access during the fall hunting season (Sept 1 to Dec 31). There were notable differences in responses based on county of residence in the region. There were more from Polk County who provided input that thought all DNR roads should be closed to motorized vehicles (160) than responses from all other counties who thought all roads should be open to motorized vehicles (144). Respondents who resided in the rest of the counties of the region were split on the question between closing all roads and opening some roads to motorized vehicles.

INPUT GATHERED AS PART OF THE WISCONSIN SCORP.

In 2016 as part of the development of the SCORP, the department asked a random sample of Wisconsin residents to identify additional outdoor recreation opportunities needed in their home county. The most frequently identified needs statewide were:

- hiking/walking/running trails
- bicycling trails
- public shore access to lakes, rivers, and streams
- public shooting ranges
- public campsites
- local parks and playgrounds

Respondents living in the nine counties in the Great Northwest Region identified the following activity at a higher rate than the state average:

- hunting opportunities
- outdoor courts for tennis, handball, basketball

Great Northwest Region residents identified four activities less frequently than the state average:

- ball fields
- local parks and playgrounds.
- public shore access to lakes, rivers, and streams
- public boat launches
- public shooting ranges
- public campsites

² For purposes of the ROA, “recreational vehicles” includes off highway vehicles, ATVs, UTVs, and off highway motorcycles.

FUTURE RECREATION NEEDS IN THE GREAT NORTHWEST REGION

The Great Northwest Region has an abundance of existing opportunities for most types of outdoor recreation, as evidenced in part by the large number of visitors the region receives each year. These opportunities are related to the diversity of public land ownership in the region. Even with the existing supply of opportunities available in the region, the public identified several future recreational needs. The public also expressed strong support to leverage existing opportunities to provide better and more recreational experiences for residents and visitors.

The department used the following sources to identify which recreation opportunities are most needed in the region:

- Public input on recreation needs submitted during the comment period (August 3 to September 8, 2017).
- Data on recreation participation and needs gathered in a 2016 survey as part of the development of the 2017-2022 SCORP.
- Data gathered in previous SCORP planning efforts.

From this information, department staff grouped the relative needs for recreation activities as high, medium or low. The groupings are as follows:

Future recreation needs in the Great Northwest Region – High	Future recreation needs in the Great Northwest Region - Medium	Future recreation needs in the Great Northwest Region – Low
ATV/UTV riding Bicycling - bicycle touring/road riding Bicycling - mountain biking/off-road biking Bird or wildlife watching Camping - developed Camping - primitive Canoeing or kayaking Fishing - lake fishing from a boat, canoe, or kayak Fishing - lake fishing from shore or a pier Fishing - stream or river fishing from shore or wading Four-wheel vehicle driving Hiking, walking, trail running, backpacking Hunting - big game Motorboating (waterski/tubing, personal watercraft) Off-highway motorcycle riding Swimming in lakes and rivers	Cross country skiing Dog walking Fishing - ice fishing Fishing - river fishing from a boat, canoe, or kayak Gather mushrooms, berries, etc. Horseback riding Hunting - migratory birds Hunting - small game Nature photography Participating in nature-based education programs Picnicking Snowmobiling Snowshoeing Target shooting - firearms Visiting a beach, beach walking	Bicycling - fat tire/snow biking Dog sledding/skijoring Dog training Dog trialing Geocaching Horse cart driving Hunting - turkey Rock climbing Sailing, windsurfing, rowing, stand-up paddling Scuba diving/snorkeling Target shooting - archery Trapping Whitewater rafting

OPPORTUNITIES TO MEET FUTURE RECREATION NEEDS IN THE GREAT NORTHWEST REGION ON DEPARTMENT- MANAGED LANDS

On behalf of Wisconsin residents, the department owns and manages properties in the Great Northwest Region to meet a variety of ecological and recreation goals. These properties provide a range of settings and experiences – from developed sites with flush toilets and hot showers to remote places that provide wilderness settings. At some properties in the region, a wealth of recreation opportunities is currently provided; at other properties, recreation plays a secondary role in their purpose.

Applying the regional needs listed above, the department evaluated the properties it manages in the Great Northwest Region to identify places where it could potentially incorporate some activities or enhance existing opportunities to meet these needs. The identification of department-managed lands that appear to be “good fits” to provide different activities will be used to help focus the department’s work developing and updating property master plans. A description of opportunities to meet recreation needs in the Great Northwest Region (on department-managed lands) follows.

NON-MOTORIZED TRAIL RECREATION

Non-motorized trail recreation has been and continues to be a primary outdoor activity throughout the year in the Great Northwest Region. From hiking the national scenic trails in the summer to cross country skiing in the winter, the region’s residents and visitors take advantage of the numerous opportunities that currently exist.

Several department properties have sizable amounts of uplands that could potentially provide excellent opportunities to expand existing bicycle trail networks or create new ones. Opportunities also exist to connect bicycle trails on department properties with adjoining public properties and bicycle routes on local roads and state highways.

Participation in mountain biking has grown recently in the region and demand exists for trails suitable for a variety of skill levels. As opposed to recreational bicycle touring, where there are benefits to creating multiple connecting linkages, meeting the growing need for mountain biking and off-road biking opportunities can be created or expanded at multiple, stand-alone sites throughout the region. Mountain biking trails are constructed, narrow trails less than two feet wide.

Hiking, walking, and running on trails in the region remains very popular activities. Many opportunities currently exist on department properties throughout the region. Additional trails near population centers are likely to be most frequently used.

Cooperatively Managed Trails

It should be noted that the department owns several state trails in the region. However, many of these trails are cooperatively managed by local governments, usually counties. In these partnerships, the department typically holds the land ownership while the partners develop, maintain and operate the trail. Also, the managing partners conduct planning processes to determine which recreational uses will be allowed on the property. Since use decisions are planned by the trail partners, cooperatively managed trails will not be listed below as potential “good fits” in this analysis. However, the information collected will be provided to the partners for their use in future planning efforts.

For the Great Northwest Region, cooperatively managed trails include:

- Cattail State Trail
- Gandy Dancer State Trail
- Saunders State Trail
- Stower Seven Lakes State Trail
- Tuscobia State Trail (Sawyer County only)
- Wild Rivers State Trail

The following table lists current and potential future opportunities for non-motorized trail activities

Recreation Activity	Activity currently exists at the property; there are opportunities to expand this use	Activity currently exists at the property; there are only limited opportunities to expand this use	Activity currently does not exist at the property; there are opportunities to add this use	Activity currently does not exist at the property; there are only limited opportunities to add this use
Bicycling - bicycle touring/ road riding	Tusconbia State Trail Governor Knowles State Forest Brule River State Forest Uhrenholdt Memorial Timber Demo Forest Clam River Fishery Area	Amsterdam Sloughs, Crex Meadows, Fish Lake, Namekagon Barrens, Douglas County, and Beaver Brook Wildlife Areas Big Bay State Park Copper Falls State Park Amnicon Falls State Park Interstate Park Pattison State Park	Straight Lake State Park Chippewa Flowage Flambeau River State Forest	Hay Creek-Hoffman Lake, White River, and Totogatic Lake Wildlife Areas Totogatic Wild River Yellow River, Sand Creek, Benson Creek, Beverly Lake, Grindstone Creek, McDermott Brook, McKenzie Creek, Sawyer Creek, Whalen Creek, and Bean Brook Fishery Areas Sand Lake Rearing Station
Bicycling - mountain biking/off-road biking	Copper Falls State Park Governor Knowles State Forest Brule River State Forest	Amsterdam Sloughs, Crex Meadows, and Fish Lake Wildlife Areas Tusconbia State Trail	Hay Creek-Hoffman Lake, Totogatic Lake, McKenzie Creek, and Potato Creek Wildlife Areas Big Bay, Amnicon Falls, Pattison, and Straight Lake State Parks Chippewa Flowage Totogatic Wild River Flambeau River State Forest Clam River, Sand Creek, Leader Lake, McDermott Brook, Bean Brook, and Sawyer Creek Fishery Areas Hauer Creek Remnant Fishery Area	White River, Loon Lake, New Auburn, Douglas County, Balsam Branch, Joel Marsh, Rice Beds Creek, Straight River, Ten Mile Creek, Washington Creek, Chief River, Kissick Swamp, Totogatic, and Weirgor Springs Wildlife Areas Uhrenholdt Memorial Timber Demo Forest Engle Creek Springs, Yellow River, Benson Creek, Beverly Lake, Grindstone Creek, McKenzie Creek, and White River Fishery Areas South Shore Lake Superior Fish and Wildlife Area St. Louis River Stream Bank Area Sand Lake Rearing Station Interstate Park
Hiking, walking, trail running, backpacking	All department properties are open to hiking, although most fishery, wildlife and natural areas do not have designated trails. Designated trails are found on state park, trail, forest, and flowage properties. Nearly all department properties have opportunities to add at least some designated hiking/ running/backpacking trails.			

MOTORIZED TRAIL RECREATION

The department provides two types of motorized access in the Great Northwest Region: (1) access for street-legal vehicles on about 300 miles of roads it maintains for public use and (2) trails and routes for snowmobiles and ATV/UTVs, of which there are over 200 miles of rail-to-trail corridors primarily managed by counties. There are even more miles across department properties for snowmobile use.

The department does not believe there is public interest or a need to close substantial portions of the existing open roads to meet broad-based ecological or recreational needs. There may be need to close stretches of the existing open road network on department lands due to specific situations. These instances will be identified and addressed in subsequent master planning processes.

There is public interest in using DNR forest roads – currently open to street-legal vehicles – to ATV/UTV and off highway motorcycle use, both as a riding experience and to enable connections of the larger regional network of routes. More and more towns are allowing ATV/UTVs on their local roads. In fact, the Great Northwest Region has the greatest collection of trails and road-route mileage in the state at over 4,500 miles and counting. As more and more department properties are reached through road-routes, there are increasing opportunities to make connections across department-managed lands to help facilitate this network.

The Great Northwest Region has the most opportunity available for ATV/UTV riding. However, there are few opportunities for other types of motorized access. Given the size, location, and distribution of the department-owned properties in parts of the region, it may be possible to incorporate some motorized recreational use at some properties listed in the table below. It is the department's expectation that motorized recreational use can be established in ways that minimize adverse impacts to neighbors, sensitive places and resources, existing recreational use patterns, and other considerations. The specific properties and portions of properties for motorized recreational use will be determined in the property master planning process.

a) ATV/UTV riding

There is a growing demand for riding opportunities that has resulted in an increasing number of towns allowing ATV/UTVs on local roads by designating them as routes. Most ATV/UTV riders prefer trails or routes that are winding and narrower rather than straight and wide. However, local roads (even if they are straight and wide) that provide a connection from one desirable setting to another is generally considered an acceptable riding experience.

The department believes there are potential opportunities to provide connections to the regional network of ATV/UTV trails and routes. Given the wet nature of many seasonally-open roads (these are mostly in wet areas that are only open during the winter when the ground is frozen, typically for snowmobiling), it appears there are only limited stretches where these roads could provide ATV/UTV riding opportunities.

b) Off-highway motorcycle riding

There are two types of off-highway motorcycles – those that are street-legal (that is, they are licensed, plated, and have required safety features such as brake lights, rearview mirror, and turn signals) and those that are not. Street-legal motorcycles that are also designed for off-road use are commonly called dual-sport motorcycles. These motorcycles are currently allowed on all public roads on department properties. Off-highway motorcycles that are not licensed and street-legal (typically these motorcycles are lighter weight, have high ground clearance, and knobby tires) are not currently allowed on department roads.

Although preferred riding experiences are narrow, winding trails that meander through the forest, primitive roads (2-tracks) can provide high-quality rides. As with ATV/UTVs, routes (even wide and straight) are acceptable ways to connect higher-quality riding experiences.

Since dual-sport motorcycles are already allowed on all open department roads, to provide increased riding opportunities would require opening more roads to street-legal vehicles or to establish new trails.

Identifying and signing preferred routes of travel may both concentrate use in the most appropriate corridors while also encouraging more use.

c) Off-highway vehicle driving

Off-highway, four-wheel drive vehicle drivers prefer a variety of experiences. Some like to climb and descend technically challenging hills that test their maneuverability and driving skills. Others like to drive on hilly, winding primitive roads exploring the forests and countryside. Of course, many drivers enjoy both types of experiences. Some four-wheel drive trucks are street-legal (that is, they have license plates and all the required safety features) while others are not. Four-wheel drive vehicles that are not street-legal are not allowed on public roads.

The following table lists current and potential future opportunities for motorized trail activities.

Recreation Activity	Activity currently exists at the property; there are opportunities to expand this use	Activity currently exists at the property; there are only limited opportunities to expand this use	Activity currently does not exist at the property; there are opportunities to add this use	Activity currently does not exist at the property; there are only limited opportunities to add this use
ATV/UTV riding	Governor Knowles State Forest Flambeau River State Forest Benson Creek Fishery Area	Sawyer Creek Fishery Area Amnicon Falls State Park Amsterdam Sloughs, Crex Meadows, Fish Lake, Namekagon Barrens, Totogatic, and Beaver Brook Wildlife Areas	Brule River State Forest McDermott Brook and Beverly Lake Fishery Areas Hauer Creek Remnant Fishery Area Tuscobia State Trail Chippewa Flowage	Hay Creek-Hoffman Lake, White River, Totagatic Lake, Douglas County, Straight River, and Weirgor Springs Wildlife Areas Big Bay, Copper Falls, Pattison, and Straight Lake State Parks Totogatic Wild River Uhrenholdt Memorial Timber Demo Forest Engle Creek Springs, Yellow River, White River, Clam River, Sand Creek, Grindstone Creek, Bean Brook, McKenzie Creek, and Whalen Creek Fishery Areas South Shore Lake Superior Fish and Wildlife Area Yellow Lake Statewide Habitat Area Sand Lake Rearing Station
4-WD vehicle driving	Governor Knowles State Forest	Hay Creek-Hoffman Lake, Amsterdam Sloughs, Crex Meadows, Fish Lake, Namekagon Barrens, and Douglas County Wildlife Areas Brule River State Forest Flambeau River State Forest	Tuscobia State Trail Chippewa Flowage Hauer Creek Remnant Fishery Area	White River, Totagatic Lake, and Straight River Wildlife Areas Uhrenholdt Memorial Timber Demo Forest Engle Creek Springs, Yellow River, White River, Clam River, Sand Creek, Benson Creek, Beverly Lake, Grindstone Creek, McDermott Brook, Bean Brook, McKenzie Creek, Sawyer Creek, and Whalen Creek Fishery Areas Yellow Lake Statewide Habitat Area Sand Lake Rearing Station

Recreation Activity	Activity currently exists at the property; there are opportunities to expand this use	Activity currently exists at the property; there are only limited opportunities to expand this use	Activity currently does not exist at the property; there are opportunities to add this use	Activity currently does not exist at the property; there are only limited opportunities to add this use
Off-highway motorcycle riding	Governor Knowles State Forest	Amsterdam Sloughs, Crex Meadows, Fish Lake, and Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Areas	Tussock State Trail Chippewa Flowage Brule River State Forest Flambeau River State Forest	Hay Creek-Hoffman Lake, White River, Totogatic Lake, Douglas County, and Straight River Wildlife Areas Big Bay, Copper Falls, Amnicon Falls, and Pattison State Parks Totogatic Wild River Flambeau River State Forest Uhrenholdt Memorial Timber Demo Forest Engle Creek Springs, Yellow River, White River, Clam River, Sand Creek, Benson Creek, Beverly Lake, Grindstone Creek, McDermott Brook, Bean Brook, McKenzie Creek, Sawyer Creek, and Whalen Creek Fishery Areas South Shore Lake Superior Fish and Wildlife Area Yellow Lake Statewide Habitat Area Sand Lake Rearing Station

OTHER FORMS OF RECREATION

In addition to trail-based activities, there is considerable demand for many other types of outdoor recreation in the Great Northwest Region, including camping, hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, swimming and a variety of boating.

Big game hunting in the Great Northwest has been popular for generations. At the turn of the century, groups of hunters would set-up “deer camps” in the large northern forests, however, only a few of these traditional camps remain. With improvements in transportation and the expansion of vacation properties, hunting in the Great Northwest is becoming more of an individual endeavor.

Camping was one of the area’s early draws and remains a popular activity. The department currently provides a range of camping opportunities from primitive, isolated sites with only a fire ring and box latrine to densely grouped campgrounds with flush toilets and hot showers. Although many of the department’s campgrounds are full on summer weekends, most are only partially at capacity during the week and in the spring and fall.

Canoe and kayak opportunities are significant in this region. There are two national water trails –St. Croix Riverway and the Lake Superior Water Trails. In addition, there are numerous small and medium-sized lakes that are popular fishing and boating destinations. There are state properties that have access to lakes and waterways that could serve these activities. Although there are many existing boat launches (both sites that accommodate trailers with motorboats as well as carry-in access for canoes and kayaks) there are several opportunities for additional access sites on underserved lakes on department properties to meet the demand.

The following table lists current and potential future opportunities for these other forms of recreation.

Recreation Activity	Activity currently exists at the property; there are opportunities to expand this use	Activity currently exists at the property; there are only limited opportunities to expand this use	Activity currently does not exist at the property; there are opportunities to add this use	Activity currently does not exist at the property; there are only limited opportunities to add this use
Camping – primitive	Copper Falls State Park Amnicon Falls State Park Pattison State Park Straight Lake State Parks North County National Scenic Trail Chippewa Flowage Governor Knowles State Forest Brule River State Forest Flambeau River State Forest	Crex Meadows Wildlife Area Douglas County Wildlife Area Ice Age Trail	Hay Creek-Hoffman Lake, Totogatic Lake, Amsterdam Sloughs, Fish Lake, Namekagon Barrens, Straight River, Potato Creek, Ten Mile Creek, Washington Creek, Chief River, Kissick Swamp, Totogatic, and Weirgor Springs Wildlife Areas Big Bay State Park Interstate Park Totogatic Wild River Clam River, Sand Creek, Bean Brook, Beverly Lake, Grindstone Creek, McDermott Brook, Namekagon River, and Sawyer Creek Fishery Areas Hauer Creek Remnant Fishery Areas Yellow Lake Statewide Habitat Area St. Louis River Stream Bank Area	White River, Loon Lake, New Auburn, Scattered, Balsam Branch, Joel Marsh, Loon Lake, McKenzie Creek, Rice Beds Creek, Silvernail, and Goose Lake Wildlife Areas Tuscobia State Trail Uhrenholdt Memorial Timber Demo Forest Engle Creek Springs, Yellow River, Big Brook, White River, Parker Creek, Benson Creek, McKenzie Creek, and Whalen Creek Fishery Areas South Shore Lake Superior Fish and Wildlife Area Sand Lake Rearing Station

Recreation Activity	Activity currently exists at the property; there are opportunities to expand this use	Activity currently exists at the property; there are only limited opportunities to expand this use	Activity currently does not exist at the property; there are opportunities to add this use	Activity currently does not exist at the property; there are only limited opportunities to add this use
Camping - developed (modern)	Copper Falls State Park Pattison State Park Interstate Park Governor Knowles State Forest Flambeau River State Forest Brule River State Forest	Crex Meadows Wildlife Area Big Bay State Park	Hay Creek-Hoffman Lake, Amsterdam Sloughs, Fish Lake, and Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Areas Amnicon Falls State Park Straight Lake State Park Chippewa Flowage Namekagon River Fishery Area	White River, Totagatic Lake, Douglas County, Balsam Branch, Straight River, and Potato Creek Wildlife Areas Engle Creek Springs, Yellow River, Clam River, Sand Creek, Bean Brook, Benson Creek, Beverly Lake, Grindstone Creek, McDermott Brook, McKenzie Creek, Sawyer Creek, and Whalen Creek Fishery Areas Uhrenholdt Memorial Timber Demo Forest
Hunting - big game	Big game hunting is allowed on all department properties outside of designated use areas (e.g., campgrounds, picnic areas, parking lots, and some designated trails). Since hunting occurs through department lands, there are not opportunities to expand the places where this activity can occur. There are, however, ways that the department can provide easier access by providing hunter/walking trails, as well as, limited seasonal motorized access to remote areas. This can encourage more people to participate in hunting on department-managed lands in the Great Northwest Region.			
Bird, wildlife watching	All department properties in the Great Northwest Region are open to this activity. Some larger properties have primitive roads to access viewing opportunities while others have walking access. Generally, there are opportunities for Friends groups, education institutions or others to expand or add nature-based programs on the larger department properties.			
Canoeing or kayaking	Although not every property with open water has formal boat access sites (or access sites on all waterbodies) many of the lakes, rivers, and larger streams on department-managed lands have some opportunities to carry in a canoe or kayak. There are potentially many opportunities to add more walk-in trails to access waterbodies with canoes or kayaks.			
Fishing - lake fishing from a boat, canoe, or kayak	The department currently maintains improved boat launches throughout the region. The properties with potential to add more improved boat access sites (ramps for trailered boats) include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Totagatic Lake Wildlife Areas • McKenzie Creek Wildlife Area • Interstate Park • Governor Knowles State Forest • Flambeau River State Forest • Yellow Lake Statewide Habitat Area • Sand Lake Rearing Station 			
Fishing - lake fishing from shore or a pier	All department lands with lakes are open to shore fishing and as such there are not opportunities to expand this opportunity. There are some fishing docks or piers on department lands and there are some opportunities to add new ones, particularly at those properties near cities and villages and with easy road access.			

Fishing - stream or river fishing from shore or wading	<p>All department lands with streams or rivers are open to shore fishing and as such there are not opportunities to expand this opportunity at existing properties. There may be opportunities to expand shore fishing opportunities through the acquisition of key parcels.</p>
Motorboating (waterski/ tubing, personal watercraft)	<p>The department currently maintains improved boat launches throughout the region. In some cases, these opportunities are on small lakes, many of which have slow-no wake protections in effect. Any new opportunities for higher speed boating would be dependent on these resource protection measures. The properties with potential to add more improved boat access sites (ramps for trailered boats) include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flambeau River State Forest • St. Louis River Stream Bank Area • Bear Lake Fishery Area
Swimming in lakes and rivers	<p>All department lands with lakes or rivers are open to swimming and as such there are not opportunities to expand this opportunity at existing properties. There may be opportunities to expand swimming opportunities through beach development or the acquisition of key parcels.</p>

SUMMARY OF THE GREAT NORTHWEST REGION ROA

With a diversity of public conservation lands, the Great Northwest Region has been an outdoor recreation destination, particularly for those in the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metro Area, dating back to Wisconsin's earliest days. Hosting a diverse set of long distance and loop trails, the region is hailed for its hiking, hunting, and motorized riding opportunities to escape into the wilderness.

Although the region is rich in current opportunities, a number of needs were expressed by residents. Topping the list of needs are: hiking, walking, and running trails, bicycling trails, hunting, fishing, camping, boating, motorized recreation trails, and swimming.

The department believes there are opportunities to meet many of the desired recreational experiences on some of the properties it manages in the Great Northwest Region. In particular, the department believes the following property groups are well-suited to provide the identified needs in the region:

STATE PARKS

- Hiking/walking/running loop trails of varying lengths. Properties in proximity to cities and villages likely would be most popular.
- Mountain biking trails that expand existing opportunities and create new destinations. These trails could provide single-track, constructed trails of varying difficulties (including potentially skills areas).
- Developed camping, including adding electrified sites to significant portions of campgrounds.
- Primitive camping to connect visitors to the myriad of lakes and rivers in the region.

STATE TRAILS

- Hiking/walking/running loop trails of varying lengths.
- Paved bicycle trails that expand the existing network linking cities and villages and campgrounds.
- ATV/UTV riding on roads that are already currently open to street-legal vehicles to provide linkages in regional trail/route networks and to provide access during the fall hunting season.
- Off-highway motorcycle riding and 4WD-vehicle driving on roads open to street-legal vehicles, with identification and signage of preferred routes to concentrate use in the most appropriate corridors.

STATE FORESTS

- Hiking/walking/running loop trails of varying lengths. Properties in proximity to cities and villages likely would be most popular.
- Surfaced bicycle trails that expand the existing network linking cities and villages and campgrounds.
- Mountain biking trails that expand existing opportunities and create new destinations. These trails could provide single-track, constructed trails of varying difficulties (including potentially skills areas).
- ATV/UTV riding to create new connections for regional trail/route networks and to provide access during the fall hunting season.
- Off-highway motorcycle riding and 4WD-vehicle driving on roads open to street-legal vehicles, with identification and signage of preferred routes to concentrate use in the most appropriate corridors.
- Developed camping, including adding electrified sites to significant portions of campgrounds.
- Primitive camping, allowing visitors to escape and surround themselves with the natural world.
- Walk-in trails to expand access to paddlers seeking a whitewater rapids or peaceful float on the river.

STATE WILDLIFE AND FISHERY AREAS

- Hiking/walking/running loop trails of varying lengths. Properties in proximity to cities and villages likely would be most popular.
- Surfaced bicycle trails that expand the existing network linking cities and villages and campgrounds.
- Mountain biking trails that create a network of new destinations. These trails could provide single-track, constructed trails of varying difficulties (including potentially skills areas).
- ATV/UTV riding on roads that are already currently open to street-legal vehicles to provide linkages in regional trail/route networks and to provide access during the fall hunting season.
- Primitive camping, allowing visitors to escape and surround themselves with the natural world.